

Grim Vigilante Tradition Persists in Life of U.S.

'Legion of Justice' New
Self-Chosen Rescuers

EDITOR'S NOTE—At various times in the history of America, citizens who felt the processes of law inadequate to suppress crime have formed "vigilance committees." There have been warnings that this may happen again in this decade. Indeed, there are some such groups already.

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The clock alternately showed the time and temperature as it above the smalltown bank entrance. "12 noon." "64." Precisely at 12:05, as instructed, two young men appeared for a secret rendezvous. As a counter-sign, one young man pulled a calling card from the breast-pocket of his Army-style combat jacket.

The card said: "LEGION OF JUSTICE."

This is an underground, paramilitary right-wing organization which claims to have already taken vigilante type action and promises to take more. Kooks? Maybe. But nonetheless.

A warning that some Americans might seek to take the law into their own hands came Oct. 16 from Atty. Gen. John Mitchell during a news conference in Indianapolis. Commenting about terrorist bomb attacks—such as those claimed by Weathermen and other self-proclaimed revolutionaries—Mitchell said if the attacks continued "citizens outside of government might feel they would have to resort to vigilante tactics."

ONE OF MANY

The Legion of Justice is but one of the self-constituted, private citizen bands which emerge and disappear and re-emerge in times that bewilder, torment or frustrate Americans. Each has as its central rationale the conviction that the law—be it the federal government or the local municipal council—somehow cannot cope with problems of public safety, racial discord,

crime, drugs, protest and dissent. Some, as is the case with the Legion of Justice, operate underground. Some, as was the case with the now disbanded White Hats of Southern Illinois, operate openly as formally organized groups.

They have a common ancestor: The Vigilance Committee. It was formed in San Francisco in 1851, at a time when adventurers, desperadoes, cheats, opportunists, flesh peddlers, gamblers and killers—drawn magically and magnetically by the Gold Rush—terrified and threatened the future of a sound community.

Any desperado then brought

to court could arrange a packed jury or pay-off a venal judge. In reaction, some 200 citizens formed the Vigilance Committee. Though it was without any legal status, it conducted "trials" and in one month executed four men by hanging.

The Ku Klux Klan and similar bands followed in the aftermath of the Civil War and America witnessed decades of lynchings and beatings of Negroes, all theoretically committed in the name of law and order or decency. In the 20th century, organized crime in a large sense became a government to itself, choosing to settle problems by gun and garrot.

Today, this possibility of private citizens—presumably law-abiding—sitting in judgment and fixing punishment is by no means remote.

Two young members of the Legion of Justice said that assassination of "traitors" is a prime goal of the group. One said he was a former member of the Minutemen, a right-wing paramilitary group that has more or less fallen apart since the imprisonment of its principal founder.

The word "vigilante" has been used with increasing frequency in Cairo, Ill., where black and white citizens are deadlocked in confrontation that has produced gunplay and arson. The United Front, a black

group, charges that blacks are continually the prey of vigilantes. The whites counter-charge that black terrorists start fires and have fired point blank at the police station. The White Hats, an armed citizens crime prevention group, had been deputized, but the state of Illinois declared the group illegal.

ALSO IN DETROIT

In Detroit, "Breakthrough"—which amounts to no more than a dozen persons—regularly derides peace demonstrations and protest groups. Its ostensible leader, Donald Lobsinger, described as a devout Roman Catholic, recently was fined \$225 for disrupting a service in a suburban Roman Catholic church because it followed the new, liberalized Mass.

In New York the Jewish Defense League presumes to act for those Jews who feel threatened or who are attacked. When militant blacks in New York announced a plan to visit a synagogue to demand reparations—as they had at some churches—the JDL lined up and prevented such a visit.

Sometimes the police cooperate with such groups when they seek to operate openly and under police rules. Night patrols of this nature have operated on and off, in black as well as white neighborhoods, in many cities.

But an organization such as the Legion of Justice gets no such official or legally recognized nod. It represents a highly organized and presumably highly disciplined "vigilante" band.

One young man, "Don," said he had received 23 weeks of military intelligence training at Fort Holabird, Md. and now can "make a bomb, bug a room, crack a safe."

"Set the record straight about vigilantes being ready to take action against left-wing terrorists," said another, named "John." "Atty. Gen. Mitchell was behind the times when he said that this might happen. We've been ready for five

years."

"His statement hasn't been a signal to us that it would be safe to attack the Communists and the revolutionaries," said John. "We already have taken action against the left."

One such event, said Don, was "the visit to the SDS headquarters in Chicago, where we liberated a notebook, made copies of it and then put it back. The notebook, which was mainly a

very interesting address book, was in the handwriting of "Kathy Wilkerson."

Miss Wilkerson is listed as a fugitive by the FBI. She was last seen March 6, fleeing from a Greenwich Village brownstone house demolished by an explosion. Authorities later said it was a bomb factory for the Weatherman, a revolutionary group which split off from the SDS. Three persons inside the house were killed.

The two young men made these major points about the Legion of Justice:

—There are perhaps 200 members, nationally. "We intend to keep it small for security purposes and for effectiveness. That's all you really need in a highly-trained guerrilla band," said Don.

—The members are formed into small units called networks. Each network has from eight to 15 members.

TWO MAIN WINGS

—There are networks in Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Indi-

ana and Michigan. Members in other areas, such as California and Colorado, are essentially "from the remnants of the underground Minuteman."

—Each network has an arms cache providing at least one M16 automatic rifle; 60mm mortars; mace and other chemicals; grenades, dynamite and other explosives; hand weapons of all sorts. "We have machine guns, too," said John.

—There are two wings. The main one is strictly military in nature. The other is the political-propaganda wing, which checks out new members, concerns itself with security, intelligence and so on.

—Field exercises are conducted regularly. "We use live ammunition," said Don, "because that's what will be used against us. The last field exercise we had was in the Chicago region on Oct. 18."

Some stunts they pull have more the earmark of fraternity brother hijinks than that of seri-

ous men with sound plans and programs.

The guillotine on the Legion's emblem, for example, was decided upon as a bunch of the boys sat around guzzling beer in a beer hall.

But these are the same men who claimed to have had "influence with those who bombed the buses in Denver."

On Feb. 5, explosions and fire wrecked 38 school buses. The Denver school district had been under court orders to bus children in order to integrate Negro and Spanish-speaking children into the system. A Denver Fire Dept. spokesman said he thought the attack might have been staged in order to discredit opponents of such integration.

But the two Legion of Justice members who are opposed to such busing said the Denver blasts were the handiwork of persons on the right-wing who "might be described as among the remnants of the underground Minutemen."

TO 'CLEAN HOUSE'

"The one thing that is the outstanding political characteristic of our organization is that Le-

gion members are tired of living in a country where the government can't clean its own house," said John.

"There is a subtle difference between being a patriot and a terrorist. History is what makes the difference. If we win or reverse the left, then I am a patriot. If the left wins, then I am a terrorist."

At present, Legion activity is limited to field maneuvers, gathering of information, securing weapons and harassment.

Sometimes there is "a direct action such as the June 27 'visit' to the Socialist Workers Party Election campaign headquarters in Chicago. The SWP claimed the office suffered \$2,000 damage and that files and equipment were stolen.

The Legion's Don and John said material was "liberated."

This was the same word used to describe the removal of the so-called Kathy Wilkerson notebook from SDS headquarters in Chicago.

Vigilantes?

"No," said John. "That goes for the amateurs. We're trained and we're professional."

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